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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR AND DCMA PRESS BISSAU-GUINEAN OFFICIALS
FOR REFORM

REF: A)DAKAR 562 B)DAKAR 477 C)DAKAR 460

Classified By: Classified by AMB Marcia Bernicat for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

11. (U) This cable was cleared by U.S. Africa Command Deputy Commander for Civil-Military Activities Mary Carlin Yates.

12. (C) SUMMARY: On April 23, 2009, U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) Deputy Commander for Civil-Military Activities (DCMA) and Ambassador Bernicat led a nine-person delegation to Bissau to meet with the interim President and other Bissau-Guinean government leaders and international representatives. The Ambassador and DCMA pressed for an end to human rights abuses by the military, early demobilization as part of security sector reform, and continued vigilance on counter-narcotics. In a roundtable with representatives from the international community, participants agreed on the need for an end to abuse of civilians by the military, and wide-scale retirement as part of any force-structure reorganization. END SUMMARY.

13. (C) On April 23, 2009, U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) Deputy Commander for Civil-Military Activities (DCMA) Mary Carlin Yates, Ambassador Bernicat, OSC Chief, PolCouns, EmbOffs, and AFRICOMOffs traveled to Bissau for meetings with interim President Raimundo Pereira, Minister of Interior Lucio Soares, and Navy Captain Zamora Induta (ref A), as well as a roundtable discussion with the United Nations Secretary General,s Special Representative to Guinea-Bissau, the head of the European Union,s security sector reform (SSR) mission, the ambassadors from the European Commission, Portugal, and Senegalese charg. Following the meetings, the Ambassador and DCMA held a press conference (septel to follow).

INTERIM PRESIDENT TAKING STEPS TO PROMOTE STABILITY

14. (C) In the meeting with interim President Raimundo Pereira, the Ambassador praised the budding strategic collaboration between the USG and GOGB, citing U.S. support for the investigation into the assassinations and for counter-narcotics efforts as examples of the growing relationship. She emphasized the importance of subordination of the military to civilian authority, an end to abuses by members of the armed forces, and a demonstration of political will to begin demobilization and security sector reform as well as to complete the investigation into the assassinations of former President Bernardo Vieira and former defense chief General Batista Tagme Na Wai. She also urged an end to impunity that has kept the country locked in a cycle of violence for decades.

15. (C) Pereira concurred that dialogue and ending impunity were essential elements for national stability and encouraged continued USG assistance for the investigation into the assassinations. The interim President described an April 21 multi-sector dialogue he chaired in which politicians, members of civil society, and representatives from the armed forces came together to express their grievances. According to Pereira, members of civil society pressed for an end to human rights abuses, the politicians called for the subordination of the military, while the representatives of the armed forces decried the political exploitation and manipulation of the military.

16. (C) Concerning the abuse of civilians by members of the armed forces, Pereira said that his office intervened in the case of the military's unlawful arrest of defense attorney Pedro Infanda (ref C), instructing the military to turn Infanda over to the Attorney General. In the case of the beating Audit Court Chief Justice Francisco Fadul, allegedly by members of the armed forces, the military assured Pereira that they were not involved, he said. Nevertheless, the interim President ordered the formation of a commission to investigate the beating of Fadul and his wife by men in military uniforms.

17. (C) The DCMA reiterated the U.S. call for the subordination of the military and an end to human rights abuses. She discussed military-to-military cooperation and cited AFRICOM's collaboration with the coast guard of Cape Verde as an example of the assistance the USG can provide in the fight against drug traffickers. In response, Pereira lamented that Guinea-Bissau security forces lack the means,

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such as boats and vehicles, to adequately respond to the problem. The interim President said that when the National Assembly reconvenes in May, the parliamentarians will consider legislation designed to create an asset forfeiture law that would allow authorities to sell the suspected Venezuelan drug plane, grounded at Bissau's airport since July, 2008.

MINISTER OF INTERIOR SEEKS U.S. SUPPORT

18. (C) In the meeting with Interior Minister Soares, the Ambassador explained that the USG would like to increase assistance to Guinea-Bissau to support counter-narcotics efforts and SSR. That assistance, however, will depend upon the steps taken first by Guinea-Bissau to build confidence, she said. Rapidly demobilizing a significant percentage of the armed forces would demonstrate the government of Guinea-Bissau's (GGOB) commitment to meaningful SSR, she noted. For example, the Ambassador further suggested, the government should proceed with plans to create a unit within one of the civilian law enforcement and security forces that would provide security to top GGOB officials, eliminating the leaders, dependence on the military for personal security.

19. (C) The DCMA highlighted the subordinate yet collaborative role that the U.S. military has with civilian authorities, as well as its work with international partners, citing AFRICOM training of security officials in Cape Verde as a prime example. The DCMA noted, however, that U.S. law circumscribes potential U.S. support for militaries with records of human rights violations, alluding to the March attacks on civilians by members of the armed forces (ref C).

110. (C) In response, Soares expressed appreciation for the team from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) that deployed to Bissau to assist with the official investigation into the March dual assassinations of Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Tagme Na Wai and President Joao Bernardo Vieira (ref C). Soares expressed interest in the possibility of U.S. training for a civilian protection detail for the country's senior leadership. He was confident that the June

28 presidential election would take place, and called for greater collaboration with the USG on counter-narcotics. He also pressed for the re-opening of the U.S. Embassy in Bissau, closed since the civil war in 1998.

TIME TO MOVE FORWARD ON SSR

¶11. (C) While in Bissau, the Ambassador and the DCMA hosted a lunch attended by Joseph Mutaboba, the United Nations Secretary General's Special Representative to Guinea-Bissau; General Juan Esteban Verastegui, Chief of Mission for the European Union's SSR mission; Frank Nulli, Ambassador from the European Commission; Antonio Manuel Ricoca Freire, Ambassador from Portugal; and General Abdoulaye Dieng, Chargé from Senegal. The objective of the lunch was to discuss candidly the status of SSR efforts in Guinea-Bissau and to formulate a basic consensus concerning the way forward.

¶12. (C) Verastegui, in Bissau since May, 2008, confirmed that the military was thoroughly consulted prior to the National Assembly's approval of the SSR strategy two and a half years ago (in spite of recent statements by the Bissau-Guinean Minister of Defense and others that the military had not been consulted). He expressed frustration that the GOGB military and officials now want to tinker with not only the agreed-upon numerical targets of soldiers and sailors, but also fundamentally alter the kind of armed forces envisioned in the strategy. He concurred that the strategy can be modified, but that it should be altered by an act of parliament and not on an ad hoc basis by leaders motivated by self-interest. Verastegui insisted, however, that the time for deliberation on the nature of SSR had ended, and that the international community must pressure GOGB officials to act, even if the immediate result was not the ideal defense force envisioned by the current leadership.

¶13. (C) Verastegui noted that the envisioned structure and composition of the Bissau-Guinean armed forces are not based on any threat assessment, and suggested his agreement with Vieira's supposed observation that the country does not need a military. However, the politics and history of Guinea-Bissau oblige the existence of a military. Therefore, the best hope, he said, is to right-size the troops in

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relation to the funding and equipment at their disposal. He emphasized that the key to demobilizing was a credible pension system managed by the international community. Noting that there are several active members of the armed forces in their eighties, Verastegui suggested that every member of the military over 50 years old be retired, and that those who want to return to active duty must first pass the requisite physical exam.

¶14. (C) Portuguese Ambassador Freire expressed his strong opinion that the international community should fight impunity in Bissau not by criticizing and undermining the credibility of the investigation into the assassinations, but rather by supporting the investigative commission and by the use of quiet diplomacy. Responding to Freire's suggestion that the lunch participants identify areas of agreement, Mutaboba posited that unanimity existed on the insistence that the military end abuse of civilians. Verastegui concurred, noting that Brussels will not extend his mission's mandate beyond November 2009, if the abuses continue. Participants also agreed that there was a need for retirement of military personnel in order to facilitate a force-structure reorganization. In forging a consensus on terminology, Verastegui objected to the word &demobilization, which implies a post-conflict environment, and insisted on the use of &retirement instead.

¶15. (C) EC Chief of Delegation Nulli noted that the GOGB must possess the political will to transform the SSR strategy into

an action plan. He speculated that the civilian leadership of the GOGB is committed to reform, but is currently in a weak position vis--vis the military, which is satisfied with its current position of power without responsibility. Nulli reminded the participants that in addition to SSR, the GOGB also needs to reform the justice sector, public administration, and public finance. Concerning next steps, Mutaboba expressed his support for a more politically-acceptable team of ECOWAS experts to be deployed to Bissau to provide guidance on SSR and other security issues. Verastegui cautioned, however, that the international community must avoid sending more advisors than the GOGB can effectively use.

COMMENT

¶16. (C) Interim President Pereira never expected or intended to become president and is not a dominant political figure. However, Pereira, the number two of the ruling party and a close confidant of Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Junior (who was in Cape Verde on April 23 following the international roundtable of SSR in Guinea-Bissau) will undoubtedly pass the firm and unambiguous U.S. message to the Prime Minister. It is very possible that no civilian leader is capable of countering or limiting the military's dominance of the country at this time. However, if it can be done, Gomes could very well be the only one capable of doing it, given his close relationship with Induta and his resounding electoral victory last fall. As the international spotlight turns from the brutal murders to the need for urgent reform, Gomes will need to try to forge a consensus on SSR and wider public sector reform. Unfortunately, since taking office, Gomes has squandered much of his political capital earned in his party's landslide victory in the November 2009 legislative elections. He has been in conflict with a large minority of his own party in the National Assembly. If Gomes is to successfully implement reform, the international community, including ECOWAS and donor countries will have to apply pressure as well as provide support.

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